

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

SENT TO D.C.  
10-4-96

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Promontory Apartments

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number 5530-5532 South Shore Drive

not for publication

city or town Chicago

vicinity

state Illinois

code IL

county Cook

code 031

zip code 60637

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

William L. Wheeler

10-4-96

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Promontory Apartments  
Name of Property

Cook, Illinois  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

n/a

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

n/a

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic, Multiple Dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic, Multiple Dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

International Style  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Wood  
walls Concrete  
Brick  
roof \_\_\_\_\_  
other Steel  
Glass

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from Instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1949

Significant Dates

1949

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig, and Pace

Associates, Associated Architects

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

\_\_\_\_\_

Promontory Apartments  
Name of Property

Cook County, Illinois  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of Property 0.885

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	16	45171510	462168810
Zone	Easting	Northing	
2			

3			
Zone	Easting	Northing	
4			

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Anthony P. Amarose, Pao-Chi Chang, Alfred Swenson  
organization Promontory Apartments Trust date June 10, 1996  
street & number 5530-5532 South Shore Drive telephone 312-493-5792 (APA)  
city or town Chicago state Illinois zip code 60637

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional Items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Each Tenant-Owner of a Certificate of Beneficial Interest  
street & number 5530-5532 South Shore Drive telephone 312-684-6300-Managing Agent  
city or town Chicago state Illinois zip code 60637

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Promontory Apartments

## 7. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

### A. Building Type

The Promontory Apartments is a 22-story cooperative, tenant-owned, owner-occupied high-rise apartment building, with 122 dwelling units occupying floors 1-21.

### B. Setting

The site of the building is located at 5530-5532 South Shore Drive on the Chicago lakefront, overlooking Promontory Point in Burnham Park. The building forms a part of an almost continuous wall of high-rise apartment buildings that run along the lakefront parks from 48th Street to 56th Street. Many of these buildings date from the 1920's, and the building of Promontory Apartments in 1949 marked a new epoch in high-rise construction in the neighborhood which would continue through the 1980's.

### C. General Characteristics

The building is located at the eastern edge of the property, and runs from lot line to lot line to maximize views of the lake. The plan takes the form of a double T, with the horizontal cross-bars joined; the stems of the Ts (or wings), project to the west. Each T is in fact a separate building with its own address, elevators and stairways, with three apartments on each floor, sharing a small elevator lobby; this arrangement avoids the typical long apartment building corridor. There are six apartments on each of the 20 typical residential floors, and two more apartments on a mezzanine level above the ground floor to make the total of 122 units. The two buildings are joined by a common lobby at the ground floor, and the solarium on the 22nd floor. Common mechanical equipment rooms, maintenance facilities, storage lockers and a laundry room are located in the basement.

The construction materials of the building are dominated by the concrete frame, which is exposed as an architectural element on the building elevations. The other enclosure elements include 10" cavity walls consisting of an outer wythe of buff-colored face brick laid in running bond, a 2" layer of insulation, and a 4" inner wythe of concrete block with plaster finish. The cavity walls are used to completely fill some bays, and as spandrel walls under the windows. The windows are single-glazed with natural anodized aluminum frames, and have hopper units for natural ventilation. Interior ceilings are typically 3/4" suspended plaster. Interior partitions are concrete block with plaster finish or 2" solid plaster within apartment units.

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Promontory Apartments

The building structure is a reinforced concrete frame with a typical bay size of 16'-6" x 18'-7". In a typical bay the floor elements consist of beams on the column lines in the east-west direction, with pan joists spanning in the north-south direction between the beams. The building is eight bays wide from north to south, and two bays wide from east to west; the two wings are each two bays wide, and project two more bays to the west. The foundation system consists of timber bearing piles, placed in groups under each column, joined together at the top by a concrete pile cap.

## D. Exterior Description

The principal exterior feature of the building is the exposed concrete structural frame. All the beams are set flush with the brick walls on all facades, as are the columns on the north- and south-facing facades. But on the east- and west-facing facades, the columns are projected out from the wall plane, and the four structural tiers are expressed by set-backs at the seventh, twelfth and seventeenth floors.

It is now 47 years since it was completed, and the concrete shows a wide range of weathering. On some sheltered surfaces, the original gray cement paste layer is still intact. But on most columns and edge beams, erosion has exposed the heterogeneous glacial gravel aggregate; also, exposed iron in the concrete has oxidized; the combination of these two effects has been to impart a darker, ochre-brown tone to the frame.

The building also features a horizontal tripartite division, first used here by the architect, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, which he would use in all his subsequent high-rise buildings. The beginning element is a recessed loggia at the ground floor on the east or entrance side of the building (Figures 2, 8). The glass walls of the entrance vestibules and lobby lounge form the inner face of the loggia. The two extreme column bays at the north and south ends of the loggia form automobile driveways or porte-cocheres which lead through full-height openings in the ground floor to the parking lot in the rear.

Above the loggia rises the middle element, or shaft, of twenty typical residential floors. Each structural bay of the east- and west-facing facades is infilled by a 30" high brick spandrel wall surmounted by three window units; each window is divided horizontally into an operating hopper unit below and a larger fixed light above. This typical unit, with its carefully considered proportions, is repeated 320 times on these facades. On the north- and south-facing facades, the structural bays are typically infilled completely with brick cavity walls; the otherwise flat surface is relieved by vertical reveals at the meetings of

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Promontory Apartments

wall and column. On the north- and south facing walls of the projecting wings, a tier of punched windows is cut into the walls in each of the inner bays (Figures 1, 2, 6, 7).

The shaft ends with a roof above the last residential floor. From this roof rises the terminal element; it consists of a pair of two-story penthouses containing the elevator machine rooms and storage cubicles, linked together by the glass-walled solarium.

## E. Interior Description

The ground floor has a ceiling height of 11'-0" which matches the exterior loggia. The two entrance vestibules and the lobby lounge have full-height glass walls facing east overlooking the park and the waters of the lake beyond. The lounge also has a full-height glass wall on the west, set in the two bays between the two projecting wings, opening on to a paved terrace with a view to the garden beyond. The lounge thus affords an inviting view all the way through the building. The interior walls in these public spaces, including the elevator lobbies are faced with the same buff face brick used on the exterior, and the concrete columns are also exposed (Figures 4, 5, 9). Opening off the elevator lobbies are two mail rooms also enclosed in buff brick walls, lighted by clerestory windows opening onto the entrance vestibules and loggia. At the extreme north and south ends of the east side are a bicycle storage room and a receiving room, which also have clerestory windows opening toward the loggia. From the elevator lobbies, doors in the west wood-panelled walls open to corridors which lead to stairways to the basement, to exterior exits into the portecocheres, and to stairways which rise to the mezzanine level where the two ground floor apartments are located.

The stairways to the basement level lead to a central corridor, which is also served by the two freight elevators. To the west of the corridor lies the laundry room, the boiler room, which is located under the courtyard between the two wings, and a maintenance area. The remainder of the basement level east of the corridor is devoted to tenant storage lockers.

The typical upper apartment floors are reached by the passenger elevators which open onto the elevator lobbies. From each of the two lobbies, there are entrances to three apartments, two on the east side and one in the west wing; each apartment also has a service entrance opening into the two exit stairwells. The east apartment at the extreme end is entered through the living room, with a full bay of windows facing the lake; a dining alcove opens off the living room, and leads to the kitchen, which is lighted by a west window; a corridor from the living room leads to two bedrooms, one facing east and one west with a bath between. The other east-facing apartment is very similar, with a slightly

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Promontory Apartments

different arrangement of the two bedrooms, which are entered through the dining area. The third west-facing apartment is entered through a foyer, with the kitchen opening off one side. The foyer leads to the large living-dining area, with a 20-foot wide window overlooking the city; the bedroom-bath suite is entered from the end of the foyer, with one bedroom facing west and the other lighted by a window opening to the courtyard between the wings.

The solarium, located at the 22nd floor level, is a public room, one by two bays, with a 8'-3" ceiling height, for the use of the tenant-owners. On the east side there is a full height glass wall overlooking the lake, on the west there are typical east- and west facing bays with spandrel walls and windows; all the other interior surfaces are buff face brick. The solarium suite also includes a small kitchen and storage room.

## F. Alterations

In 1964-66, the Promontory Apartments Trust asked Mies to prepare designs for a number of additions and alterations to the building. The major proposed change was for the construction of a free-standing parking garage to the west of the tower, which was never executed. Another change involved the remodeling of the ground floor by creating two mail rooms, one on each side, by taking space from the original bicycle rooms, and converting the north bicycle room into a receiving room. The existing mailboxes in the entrance vestibules would be relocated to the mail rooms. These changes to the lobby were executed circa 1965, largely as shown on the Mies drawing (Ref. 21, Vol. 13, p. 478; see copy included below). The other major change was the provision of through-wall unit air-conditioners in the brick spandrel walls, which Mies recommended, and for which he also prepared a drawing (Ref. 21, Vol. 13, p. 477; see copy included below). This change was executed circa 1966, following the Mies drawing.

In 1990-94, Alfred Swenson Pao-Chi Chang Architects restored the Ground Floor Lounge and Mail Rooms. In the Lounge, the wall shelves were restored, new fan coil cooling units in stainless steel cabinets were installed, new storage cabinets were let into the walls, and a Security Guard Station including a new guard desk and TV monitor console were provided. In the Mail Rooms, new larger mailboxes were installed, the openings to the lobby increased to the full ceiling height, the walls completely finished in buff face brick, and new granite shelves with stainless steel skirts were installed. All these necessary changes were made, while retaining the historic character of Mies's original design and furniture.



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In 1993, additional minor restoration work was done on the ground floor, including covering the existing ground concrete floor finish, which had developed many cracks, with an epoxy terrazzo veneer of similar appearance, replacing the base of the curtain wall which was corroded, and installing a new concrete floor surface in the loggia and porte-cocheres.

In 1995, the Trust engaged the architect-engineer firm of Wiss Janney Elstner to design the restoration of the exterior concrete frame and exterior brickwork in accordance with Secretary of the Interior Standards, and the actual restoration of a two-bay sample was begun on the west side of the building. Early in 1996, the tenant-owners voted to spend \$1.5 million to execute the entire exterior restoration program.

**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE****I. Summary Paragraph**

The Promontory Apartments, completed in 1949, is nationally significant because it is the work of a master, and possesses high artistic value. It meets **Criterion C** and **Criterion Consideration G** for its architectural merit as an exceptionally significant building design. The architect of the Promontory Apartments was **Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969)**, an acknowledged master of world architecture. It was the first high-rise building built by Mies and marks the beginning of an important phase of his career as a designer of tall buildings for which he was to receive wide recognition. The Promontory Apartments also mark the **first significant realization** of two important design themes in Mies's subsequent work. The first of these themes is the **expression of skeleton structure as an architectural element**, in this case the exposed reinforced concrete frame. The second theme announced in the Promontory Apartments is the **tripartite horizontal division** of recessed ground floor loggia, typical intermediate floors or shaft, and a terminal element, which Mies would use in all his subsequent high-rise towers. The building also received wide international critical acclamation for the artistic quality of its design. The Promontory Apartments is the **first International Style high-rise apartment building in the nation**. Its use of simple volumes, exposed structure, and large areas of glass established the characteristics of the style. But its significance lies not only in Mies's design, but in his and the developer Herbert Greenwald's success in overcoming the formidable psychological objections to these stylistic elements by the mortgage bankers: "It looks like a Boston sugar warehouse" - "We don't understand how people can live with so much glass". The successful realization of the Promontory Apartments paved the way for the construction of the 860-880 Lake Shore Drive apartment building (listed in the National Register - July 28, 1980) and the continued collaboration of Mies and Greenwald that produced

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Promontory Apartments

more than a dozen International Style high-rise apartment buildings in Chicago, Detroit and Newark, as well as for the hundreds of other buildings of this style throughout the nation. If one wants to study the American International Style high-rise apartment building, one must begin with the Promontory Apartments. Therefore, although the building is less than 50 years old, it is of exceptional national significance.

## II. Supporting Sections

### A. History of the Promontory Apartments

In 1946, the real estate developer Herbert S. Greenwald (1915-1959) approached the architect Charles B. Genter (1907-1992) of Pace Associates about the possibility of preparing architectural designs for a new cooperative high-rise apartment building on the Chicago lakefront overlooking Promontory Point. This would be the first tall apartment building to be built in Chicago since the Great Depression. Genter had been an architectural graduate student of Mies at Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) in the early 1940's, and he suggested that Mies also participate in the design of the building.

Although Mies had never built a high-rise building, he had already completed a number of buildings for the IIT campus in Chicago. Also, his famous European works, such as the Barcelona Pavilion and Tugendhat House, had been prominently featured in the 1932 exhibition "The International Style: Architecture Since 1922" mounted by Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Both in the exhibition catalog and their subsequent book, *The International Style* (Ref. 2, pp. 28, 32-33, 180-191), Johnson and Hitchcock had hailed Mies as one of the "four great leaders of modern architecture". Greenwald discerned the value which could be added to the project by the participation of an architect of world reputation, and he accepted Genter's idea of a design team headed by Mies. Genter's firm, Pace Associates, acted as the architect of record; the firm of Holsman & Holsman and Klekamp provided mechanical and electrical engineering expertise, and Frank J. Kornacker acted as structural engineer.

Mies began preparing design studies in 1946, and after the typical apartment floor plan had been determined, he developed two different versions of the building's structure and enclosure. The first of these envisioned a steel structure with a curtain wall enclosure; on the north and south property lines, the steel frame was covered by brick walls, but on the

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east and west walls, there floor-to-ceiling windows supported by steel I-beam mullions projected outwards from the plane of the glass, and running the full 20-story height of the building (Ref. 20, Vol. 13, pp. 421-422, see copy included below)\*. The second version had a concrete structure which was exposed on all sides, infilled entirely with brick walls on the north and south property lines, and infilled with low brick spandrel walls and full-width windows on the east and west walls (Ref. 20, Vol. 13, p. 422, see copy included below). For whatever reason, the steel and glass version was rejected, although it would later form the basis of the design of the next project Mies would do for Greenwald, the 860-880 Lake Shore Drive Apartments.

However, before the project could proceed further, it would be necessary to obtain a mortgage commitment for the building. This did not prove to be an easy task, as Genter later noted (Ref. 9) :

Applications for the first mortgage [for the Promontory Apartments] were made by the developer, Mr. Herbert Greenwald, to almost every source known at the time. The adverse criticisms made then are still the classical comments of the uninformed or inexperienced man who has not had the view from within: "It looks like a Boston sugar warehouse." "We don't understand how people can live with so much glass." "There is a lack of privacy." There was, indeed, a flood of adverse publicity, and it was extremely difficult to convince anyone that they should seriously prepare proposals for the work. But Mies and his colleagues persisted and the mortgage was finally placed through a man who might be called a representative American cosmopolite, C. A. McCelvain, a man of action and interest in urban affairs, a believer in cooperative housing, and significantly enough, a flying officer in both world wars.

Apparently the arrangements for the mortgage, placed with the Trust Company of Chicago (Ref. 37), were completed in the Spring of 1947. Greenwald publicly announced on May 3, 1947 that the project would proceed (Ref. 30). The estimated cost was given as \$1.8 million, and at that time thirty applications for apartments were received. The project was advertised for bids on May 15, 1947, and Peter Hamlin Construction Company was chosen as the General Contractor, with a bid of \$1.5 million (Ref. 31). The construction documents are dated August 7, 1947, and work began in the Fall of that year.

\* Ref. 20 shows three variations of the steel and glass version, but apparently the one that Mies selected for the Museum of Modern Art 1947 exhibit can be taken as definitive.

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Mies and Greenwald had also prepared a promotional brochure (Ref. 37, see copy included below) for the building to interest buyers for the apartment units, which were to be operated by a cooperative land trust. In the brochure there are photographs of the building model, and Mies made perspective line drawings to show typical apartment interiors, with photographs of the exterior views collaged into the windows - a technique he had first used in the presentation of the Resor House in 1938 (Ref. 3, p. 163). The perspectives show traditional furniture and a general air of upper middle-class congeniality - Greenwald apparently felt Mies's own furniture would not have appealed to the prospective buyers.

The project received additional publicity when the model of the concrete version and a drawing of the steel and glass version were included in the exhibition of Mies's work at the Museum of Modern Art in November of 1947, which was organized by Philip Johnson (Ref. 3, pp. 162, 170-171). Because of the excellent site overlooking Lake Michigan and the attractive qualities of Mies's design, all the apartment units were rapidly sold. The building was completed in 1949, and fully occupied soon thereafter (Figures 1-4).

In 1965-66, the Promontory Apartments Trust asked Mies to prepare designs for certain alterations to the ground floor, and for the addition of through-wall air conditioners in the spandrel walls on the east- and west-facing facades. These changes were executed circa 1965-66 largely as shown on the Mies drawings (Ref. 20, Vol. 13, pp. 477-478, see copies included below). There have since been other minor alterations to the ground floor, which have maintained the historic character of the original design.

#### B. Mies's Career as a Master of World Architecture

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) (Refs. 20, 23, 25) was an architect who began his career in Germany, and who gained his initial fame with a series of radical projects for office towers and country houses in the early 1920's, as well as a few remarkable executed buildings, including the Wiessenhof Seidlung at Stuttgart (1927), the Pavilion for the Weimar Republic at the 1929 World's Fair in Barcelona, and the Tugendhat House in Brno (1930). In 1930 he was appointed the Director of the Bauhaus at Dessau, but was forced to close the school after the Nazis came to power in 1933. In 1938, Mies was invited to Chicago to head the IIT Architecture Department, largely at the instigation of a group of local Chicago architects including John A. Holabird, Sr., Alfred Alschuler, Alfred Shaw, Jerrold Loebel and David Adler. In 1940, Henry T. Heald, the first president of IIT, commissioned Mies to design a new campus for the Institute, and by 1946 Mies had

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completed three buildings for it, all done in collaboration with Holabird and Root as architects of record.

It was at this point that Mies met Herbert Greenwald, and was commissioned to design the Promontory Apartments. The financial and critical success of the Promontory Apartments led Greenwald to retain Mies to design another high-rise apartment project, 860-880 Lake Shore Drive. The completion of these two apartment buildings in 1949 and 1951 respectively, together with the Farnsworth House in 1950, established Mies as a national figure in American architecture. He went on to design many more important high-rise buildings and building groups, including the Commonwealth Apartments in Chicago (1956), the Seagram Building in New York (1957), the Federal Center in Chicago (1965-71), the Toronto Dominion Center in Toronto (1966-68) and the IBM Building in Chicago (1970). He also executed a number of important cultural buildings including IIT's Crown Hall (1956), the Houston Museum of Fine Arts (1956-70) and the New National Gallery of Art in Berlin (1968). Mies died in Chicago in 1969.

Mies received many honors for his work (Ref. 15, pp. 180-182) which recognized his role as a master of world architecture. In 1931, he was elected a member of the Prussian Academy of Art, but was forced to resign by the Nazi government in 1937. He was chosen in 1952 as a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects. In 1957, he was elected a member of the Order *Pour le Merite*, the highest civil honor in Germany, founded by Frederick the Great, and in 1959 received the Commander's Cross of this order. In 1959, he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, in 1960 the Gold Medal of the American Institute of Architects, and in 1966 the Gold Medal of the Institute of German Architects. He was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1961 and in 1963 he received the Institute's Gold Medal for Architecture; in 1967 he was elevated to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1963, Mies was named by President John Kennedy among the first group of recipients of the newly-founded Presidential Medal of Freedom. His life was the subject of an entry in the *Dictionary of American Biography* (Ref. 23, pp. 435-437; this is inclusive of the entrants for 1966-1970).

### C. The Importance of the Promontory Apartments to Mies's Career

The Promontory Apartments mark a decisive turn in the career of Mies and the beginning of national recognition of his American work. This was his first high-rise building, and its impact led to wide critical notice, both in the USA and Europe. (Refs. 31, 32, 33, 34, 35).

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The distinguished American critic and historian Carl Condit, reflecting on the Promontory Apartments 25 years after its completion and five years after the death of Mies, wrote in 1974 (Ref. 16):

In [1946] a young real estate entrepreneur named Herbert Greenwald, educated at the University of Chicago and possessed of a measure of civic idealism, offered the famous but seldom employed German Architect the commission for an apartment tower to be erected at the base of Promontory Point....The building launched Mies on a career that was literally to transform the skyline of Chicago and to inaugurate what the editors of *Architectural Forum* were to call the Second Chicago School [of Architecture]. (See Ref. 36)

The financial and critical success of the Promontory Apartments led Greenwald to also commission Mies and the same design team to prepare the designs for the 860-880 Lake Shore Drive Apartments. Having broken the mortgage barrier for a "modern" building (McCeivain's Trust Company of Chicago again provided the first mortgage), the more conservative features of the Promontory Apartments, such as the traditional plan and the extensive opaque wall surfaces, were now abandoned for the more radical design of floor-to-ceiling glass, prefigured in the unexecuted steel and glass version of the Promontory Apartments of 1946. 860-880 Lake Shore Drive was also a financial success, and all their cooperative apartments were soon sold after their completion in 1951. Mies' relationship with Greenwald would continue until the latter's death in 1959, and would produce more than ten other high-rise apartment buildings; the next projects were two other apartment tower groups in Chicago, the 900-910 Lake Shore Drive Esplanade Apartments and Commonwealth Promenade Apartments at 330-340 West Diversey Parkway, which would be completed in 1956 (Ref. 6, pp. 80-86).

More than anything else, it was this remarkable series of Mies's high-rise apartment buildings running from the Promontory Apartments through 860-880 Lake Shore Drive to the Commonwealth Promenade, together with the enthusiastic support of Philip Johnson of MOMA, which led Phyllis Bronfman Lambert to persuade her father, Samuel Bronfman, to commission Mies, in 1954, to design the 40-story corporate headquarters of Joseph E. Seagram & Sons in New York (Ref. 15, pp. 178-179). The completion of the Seagram Building in 1957, with its magnificent bronze curtain wall, infilled with green Tinian marble and rose-tinted glass, and its spacious plaza overlooking Park Avenue, brought Mies to the apogee of his American career. Thus the Promontory Apartments, in retrospect, can be seen as the pivotal work in Mies's American achievements.

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## D. The Significance of the Promontory Apartments in Major Themes in Mies's Work

The Promontory Apartments mark the first significant realization of two important themes in Mies's subsequent work:

- The expression of skeleton structure as an major architectural element, in this case the exposed reinforced concrete frame.
- The tripartite horizontal division of recessed ground floor loggia, typical intermediate floors or shaft, and a terminal element, in this case two penthouses joined by a solarium, which he would use in all his following high-rise buildings.

### 1. The Expression of Skeleton Structure as a Major Architectural Element

Mies first proposed an exposed skeleton structure in his project for a Concrete Office Building of 1923, which he called "skin and bones architecture" (Ref. 3, pp. 26, 30-31). However, during the remainder of his European period, Mies did not build anything which even approximated this direct exposure of structure. He returned to this theme again in his last European project, the Administration Building for the Silk Industry in Krefeld of 1937 (Ref. 3, pp. 128-130); here the building appears to have an exposed concrete structure with deep spandrel beams, suggesting the 1923 project.

After Mies arrived in Chicago, and began to develop his plans for the IIT Campus, he resumed tentative essays in exposed structure with the first buildings for the Armour Research Foundation. The end elevations of the Minerals and Metals Research Building of 1943 do indeed have exposed steel columns and beams, but the principal elevation along Federal Street has a curtain wall which conceals the actual structure while suggesting it with applied steel mullions and fascias (Ref. 3, pp. 147-149). But the next IIT building, the first section of the Mechanical Engineering Research Building (Ref. 21, Vol. 8, pp. 238-291) completed in 1945, has an exposed concrete frame, infilled with buff brick spandrel walls and windows. The building, which was never finished according to Mies's designs, and exists today in a much altered condition, was never published by Mies. It did however, provide the point of departure for the executed version of the Promontory Apartments.

The high-rise reinforced concrete frame had appeared in Chicago in the first decade of the 20th century, primarily through the work of the architect Richard Schmidt who used it for warehouses. By the early 1920's it had become the marketplace standard for high-rise apartment buildings in Chicago and remained so until the Great Depression. Thus it would

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seem logical that Greenwald and Mies would adopt it for the 22-story Promontory Apartments. Indeed the steel frame of 860-880 Lake Shore Drive would remain unique among Mies's residential high-rises; all the subsequent ones had concrete frames.

In the Promontory Apartments, Mies took the utilitarian concrete frame with common brick infill as he found it on the alley sides of earlier Chicago high-rises, and made it the basis of its architecture by introducing a striking refinement. On the east- and west-facing walls, he projected the columns outward from the face of the building, and stepped them back in four tiers, which naturally expresses the decreasing load on the columns as they rise to the roof. This also brought a sense of upreaching verticality to these facades, reminiscent of the stepped buttresses of late Gothic churches, such as the Chapel of King's College at Cambridge.

The Promontory Apartments was designed in 1946, while Mies was working simultaneously on the two other projects with exposed structures, the Farnsworth House (Ref. 3, pp. 166-167) which was not completed until 1950, and the Hiway Drive-In Restaurant for Joseph Cantor (Ref. 3, pp. 168-169), which was never executed. The Promontory Apartments was forged in the same crucible as a part of this first group of elegant, refined exposed structures, and was the first to be completed in 1949. The Promontory Apartments was Mies's first significant realized building with an exposed structure, and thus led the way to such later realized examples as Crown Hall, The Houston Museum and the New National Gallery in Berlin.

## 2. Tripartite Horizontal Division in Mies's Tall Buildings

The notion of tripartite division is a very old one in Western Art. Aristotle, in his critical theory of Greek drama set forth in the *Poetics* (Ref. 1) of the 4th century BC declares that tragedy must have "a beginning, a middle and an end". Similarly, Aristotle's contemporaries among Greek architects also divided their temple designs horizontally into three parts: the stylobate, the column and the entablature.

When the tall office building evolved in Chicago in the 1880's, it was soon clear that the classical temple formula could not be applied to it, and there was much discussion about new possibilities. The Chicago architect Louis Sullivan developed a new tripartite horizontal division for the skyscraper, which first appears in Adler and Sullivan's Wainwright Building in St. Louis, completed in 1890. Sullivan described his formula in his essay, "The Tall Building Artistically Considered", published in 1896 (Ref. 29):



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The first...story we treat in a more or less liberal, expansive and sumptuous way... The second story...in a similar way but usually with milder pretensions. Above this throughout the indefinite number of typical office tiers, we take our cue from the individual office cell, which requires a window with its separating pier, its sill and lintel... and make them all alike because they are all alike. This brings us to the attic, which...shows by its dominating weight and character that the series of office tiers has come definitely to an end.

Sullivan would execute three other tall office buildings which exemplify his theory, the Stock Exchange Building in Chicago (1893), the Guaranty Building in Buffalo (1896), and the Bayard Building in New York (1898). Indeed, the Guaranty Building seems to foreshadow Mies's recessed treatment of the ground floor: the slender intermediate columns at the first floor on the two street elevations are tantalizingly exposed, as they rise through and penetrate the sloping roofs of glass showcases, suggesting a loggia.

Mies was certainly aware of tripartite classical architectural theory from his neoclassical training under Peter Behrens, and his expressed admiration of the work of Karl Friedrich Schinkel in Berlin. It is more difficult to say how much he knew about Sullivan's work and theory. Nevertheless, when he came to design the Promontory Apartments he began the development of a tripartite horizontal division for tall buildings that seems related to both these theories. The east facade of the Promontory Apartments is the first realization of this major theme of Mies's work. The curtain wall of the ground floor is set back eight feet from the columns to form a recessed loggia, the beginning element. The lobby is about 1 1/2 stories high, since the two apartment units on the ground floor are actually raised on a mezzanine level, which also let additional light into the laundry rooms in the basement. The next 20 typical apartment floors, with exposed concrete beams and columns, infilled with brick spandrel walls and windows, form the shaft or middle element. Two penthouses linked by a glass-walled solarium at the 22nd floor form the terminal element. All these elements are carefully integrated within the overall discipline of the exposed concrete frame. Although there are hints of ground floor loggias in a number of Mies's office building projects from the later 1920's (Ref. 3, pp. 59, 61, 65), there is no suggestion of the terminal element.

Mies would continue to develop his tripartite high-rise form in 860-880 Lake Shore Drive, where he extended the loggia to all four sides of the building and made it a full two stories

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high, and defined the shaft with the parallel array of projecting steel mullions applied to the steel-clad structural frame; here the terminal elements were mechanical penthouses glazed with frosted glass. In the Commonwealth Promenade Apartments, the 860-880 Lake Shore Drive two-story loggia is repeated, and the shaft undergoes a final metamorphosis - now the columns are concealed completely, leaving the great glass planes interrupted only by horizontal spandrel ribbons and the projecting mullions; here the glass penthouse on the larger building included a luxurious duplex apartment for his patron, Greenwald. In the Seagram Building, whose complex form harks back to the Promontory Apartments (Ref. 8, pp. 26-27), the loggia extends around three sides of the tower, and the terminal element becomes a mechanical equipment floor enclosed entirely in horizontal louvers set between the mullions. The louvered mechanical floor would become the standard terminal element, which along with the loggia and mullioned shaft would be the hallmark of all of Mies's subsequent high-rise office buildings.

**E. The Artistic Value of the Promontory Apartments**

Almost immediately after its completion, the Promontory Apartments was noted by various architectural periodicals (see Refs. 31, 32, 33, 34, 35), but the articles were mostly descriptive, with very little comment, and often included other works of Mies as well. The Promontory Apartments was also noted in a number of monographs on Mies, but again largely without critical comment (see Refs. 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 18, 24, 28).

However, the Italian critic, Bruno Zevi, made this evaluation of the building in his article of July, 1950, "Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright: Poets of Space" (Ref. 32):

The Promontory Apartments, completed six months ago,...are a further indication of Mies's consistency. The technical virtuosity of the ... [glass] skyscrapers of 1919-1921, and the structural austerity [of the Concrete Office Building] of 1922 are just a distant memory. Here is a poet who sings quietly with familiar and popular words: reinforced concrete structure, tripartite windows, brick walls - no gimmicks, no accented polemics, no romantic design. What distinguishes this building from thousands of everyday commercial examples? The same characteristics that distinguish the Parthenon from its myriad provincial imitations: an extended effort, a painstaking research, an absolute conclusion that brings about an immediately perceived result, understandable in a language clear, direct and unchangeable that only a great personality can create, because such an individual author can make manifest universal values. But this is more a judgement than a characterization,

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since Mies feels the modesty to analyze, and the need to appeal to [Benedetto] Croce to say that the criticism of art is the criticism of the ugly, and about a masterpiece, nothing can be said.

Also, Sigfried Giedion, the distinguished Swiss critic and historian, took detailed note of the Promontory Apartments in the second edition of his book *Space Time and Architecture*; in the fifth and final edition (1967) (Ref. 11) he offered this definitive comment:

In 1949, thirty years after his early skyscraper studies, Mies van der Rohe was building tall apartment blocks along Lake Michigan. One of these, the Promontory Apartments, stands in south Chicago... The view from the great glass windows overlooking the limitless lake is overwhelming. Twenty-two stories. Ferroconcrete skeleton. U-shaped ground plan, as in Holabird and Roche's Marquette Building, 1894. The Promontory Apartments actually consist of two units joined as one, each containing its own elevators and stairway. The detailing is monastic in its austerity. The hand of Mies van der Rohe can be felt in the ground plan of each of the apartments and particularly in the treatment of the facade. These soaring ferroconcrete verticals, set back four times in their height, are handled with an extraordinary sensitivity and give a musical articulation to the whole facade...

Mies van der Rohe has always held "an organic principle" in mind: "We desire an order which gives everything its rightful place and we desire everything to have what is right for it according to its own nature." ...

He [Mies] makes no distinction between his approach to a single story dwelling, two story buildings or multi-story apartments. The attitude of the perfectionist controls the dimensioning of all surfaces, outlines and details. Volumes are reduced to their simplest form. An increasing architectonic refinement can be observed from his Promontory Apartments, 1949, to the black skeleton of the Lake Shore Apartments, 1951, and the light, almost immaterial ribs of the Commonwealth Apartments, 1956. Mies van der Rohe's strict discipline has had a deep moral influence upon contemporary American Architecture...

The Italian architectural historian Leonardo Benevolo, in his monumental two-volume *History of Modern Architecture* (1971) (Ref. 14) made this commentary on the Promontory Apartments:

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The first plans for the Promontory Apartments, on the shores of Lake Michigan, [in Chicago] were made in 1946.... Mies worked on two constructional solutions, in reinforced concrete with brick infill, and steel and glass. He was taking up the possibility already worked on by the masters of the Chicago School, abandoned by Sullivan, and more or less ignored ever since - the concept of the multi-storey building, not as a finite and compositionally complete organism - an effect which would be aimed at by differentiating various portions of [the] facade and emphasizing vertical links - but as a rhythmically open organism, made up of the repetition of many identical elements. This made it possible suddenly to resolve the compositional conflict between the scale of the whole and that of the details, since proportional considerations stopped at the single element, while the overall composition depended on quite other criteria and was not complete in itself, but was resolved by its relationship with [the] infinite landscape (and did in fact require a great deal of surrounding free space, as [was the case] here). This was the American concept of the *unite d'habitation* and the European one; in both cases the overall composition based on rhythmic repetition made it possible to retain a human scale whatever the size of the building, and to build a multi-storey house without losing the character of a house or becoming transformed into a monument.

The solution in reinforced concrete, selected for execution of the block, allowed a very slight hint of aesthetic unity in the effect of the [columns] which protrude, almost imperceptibly differentiating the four ascending zones of the building. This expedient was necessary to give visible support, below, to the fairly heavy structural [frame], and it was discreet enough not to disturb the rhythmic continuity of the wall; ....all the architecture depended, as in an ancient Greek temple, on the carefully considered proportion of a single element, the rhythmically repeated panel.

The comments of these critics indicate that the Promontory Apartments constitutes an aesthetic ideal among exposed concrete frame high-rise buildings composed of many identical repeated elements, and they praise its proportions and the exquisite quality with which it is detailed, particularly the stepped columns.

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Construction Drawings: The originals of the Promontory Apartments construction drawings are held by the Chicago Historical Society in Chicago.

Photographs: The negatives of black and white photographs of the Promontory Apartments building model and of the executed building made in 1947-50 by Hedrich-Blessing Photographers are held by the Chicago Historical Society.

Documents: Mies's personal papers, including those related to the Promontory Apartments, are held by the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

Correspondence and documents directly related to Mies's buildings, including those related to the Promontory Apartments, are held by the Mies van der Rohe Archive of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

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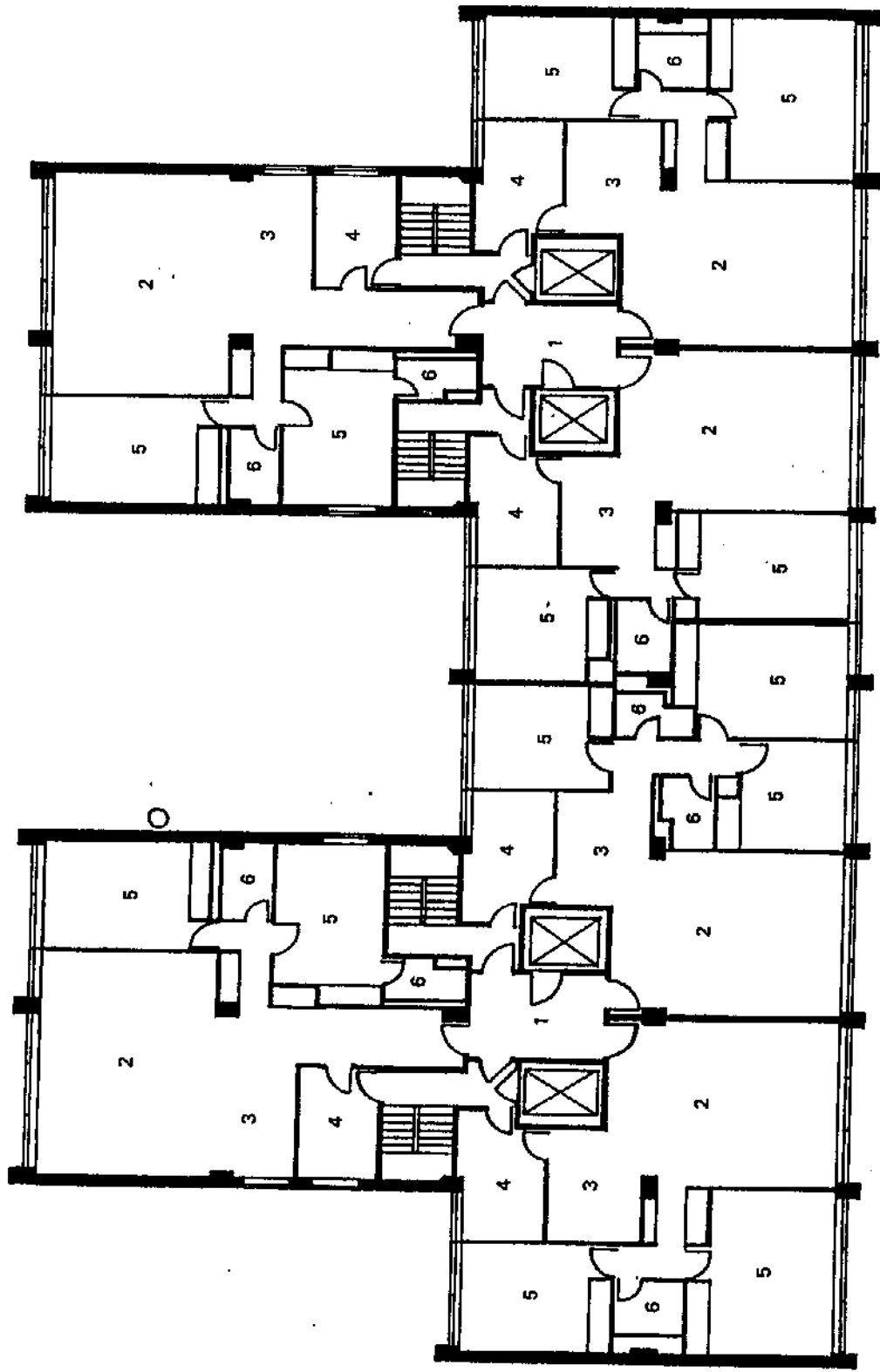
## 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

### A. Verbal Boundary Description

That part of Block 3 in East End Subdivision in Sections 12 and 13, Township 38 North, Range 14 East of the Third Principal Meridian, together with land East and adjoining a part of said Block 3 described as follows: Commencing at a point 240 feet South of the South Line of East 55th Street as extended and 169 feet East of the East line of Everett Avenue as widened, thence running East along the line parallel with the South line of East 55th Street as extended 300 feet to the line as established by the Decree of the Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois, entered January 4, 1913, in Case No. 317598 running thence southerly along the westerly line of said line established to a point 220 feet due North of the South line of said block 3, extended East running thence westerly a distance of 300 feet along a line parallel with and 220 feet due North of the South line of said Block 3 as extended East running thence North a distance of 134 feet along a line parallel with the East line of Everett Avenue as widened to the place of beginning (except the West 12 feet of the North 19 feet of the premises in question) all in Cook County, Illinois, commonly known as the Promontory Apartments at 5530-32 South Shore Drive, Chicago, Illinois.

### B. Boundary Justification

The Promontory Apartments is historically associated with this property.



TYPICAL APARTMENT FLOOR PLAN

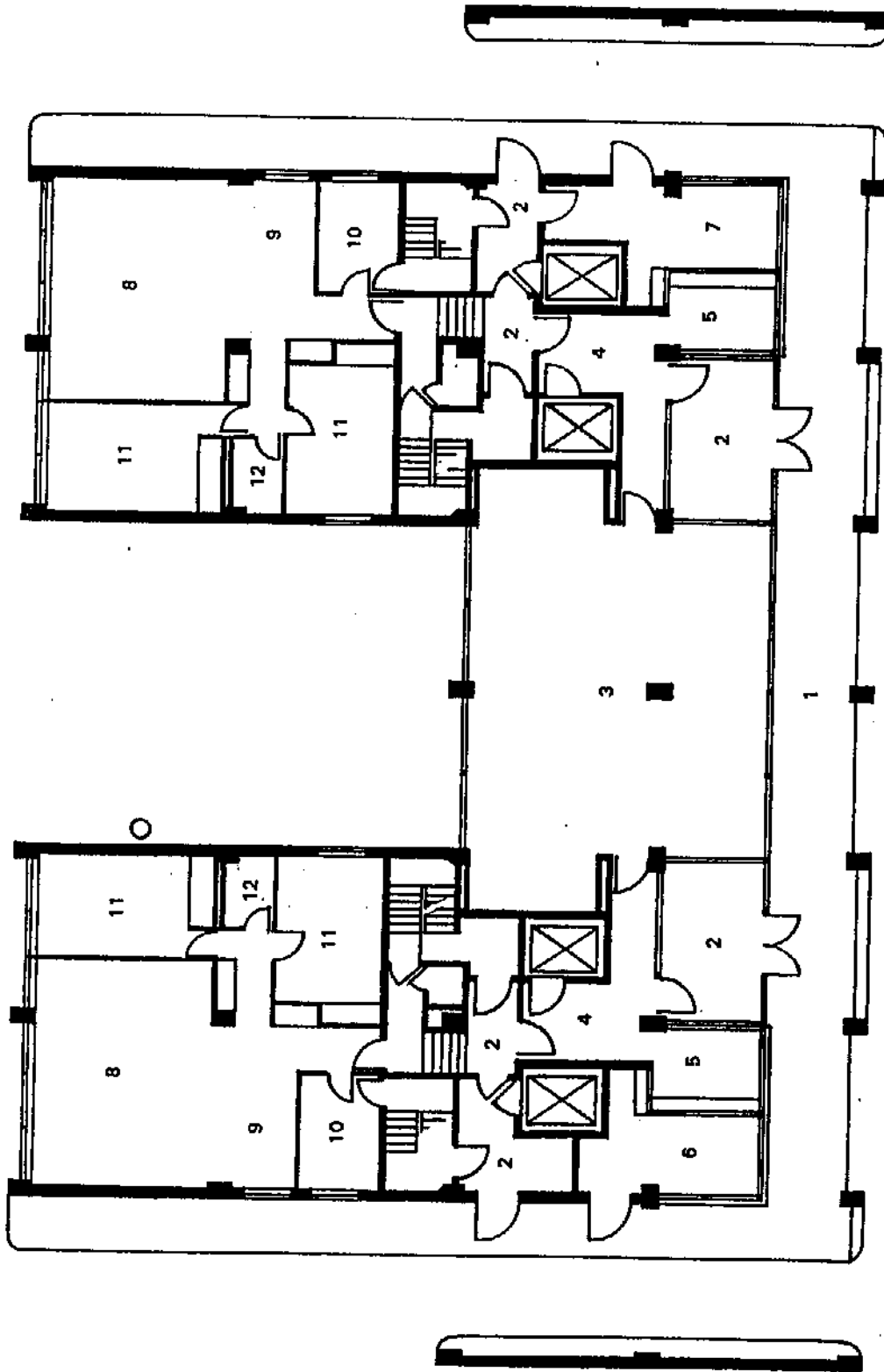
- 1. LOBBY
- 2. LIVING ROOM
- 3. DINING SPACE
- 4. KITCHEN
- 5. BEDROOM
- 6. BATHROOM



PROMONTORY APARTMENTS  
 5530-5532 SOUTH SHORE DRIVE  
 CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

LUDWIG MIES VAN DER ROHE, ARCHITECT  
 COMPLETED 1949

ALFRED SWENSON PAO-CHI CHANG ARCHITECTS  
 DELINEATORS 1996



**GROUND FLOOR PLAN  
WITH ALTERATIONS TO 1996**

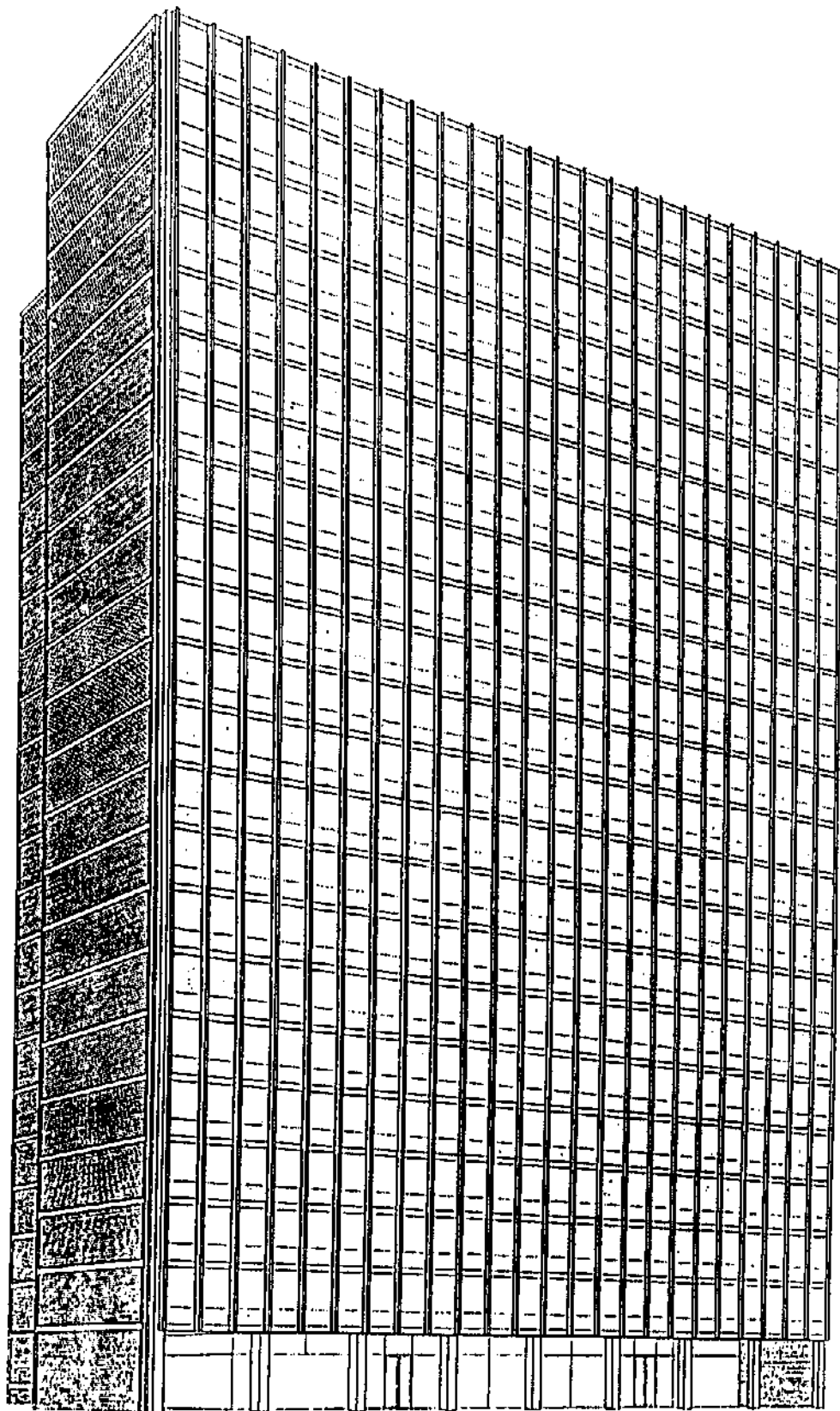
- 1. LOGGIA
- 2. VESTIBULE
- 3. LOUNGE
- 4. ELEVATOR LOBBY
- 5. MAIL ROOM
- 6. BICYCLE ROOM
- 7. RECEIVING ROOM
- 8. LIVING ROOM
- 9. DINING SPACE
- 10. KITCHEN
- 11. BEDROOM
- 12. BATHROOM



**PROMONTORY APARTMENTS**  
5530-5532 SOUTH SHORE DRIVE  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

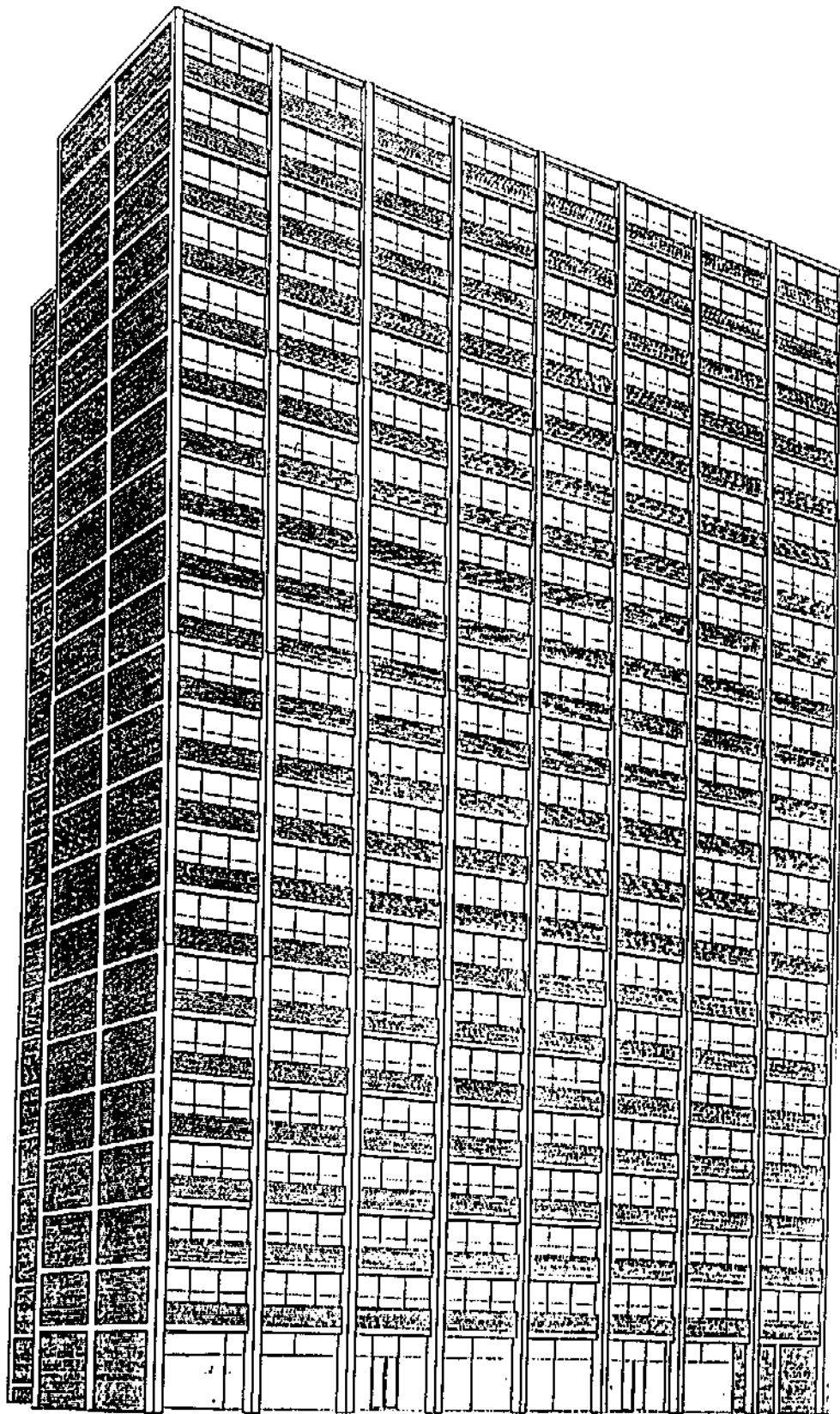
LUDWIG MIES VAN DER ROHE, ARCHITECT  
COMPLETED 1949

ALFRED SWENSON PAO-CHI CHANG ARCHITECTS  
DELINEATORS 1996



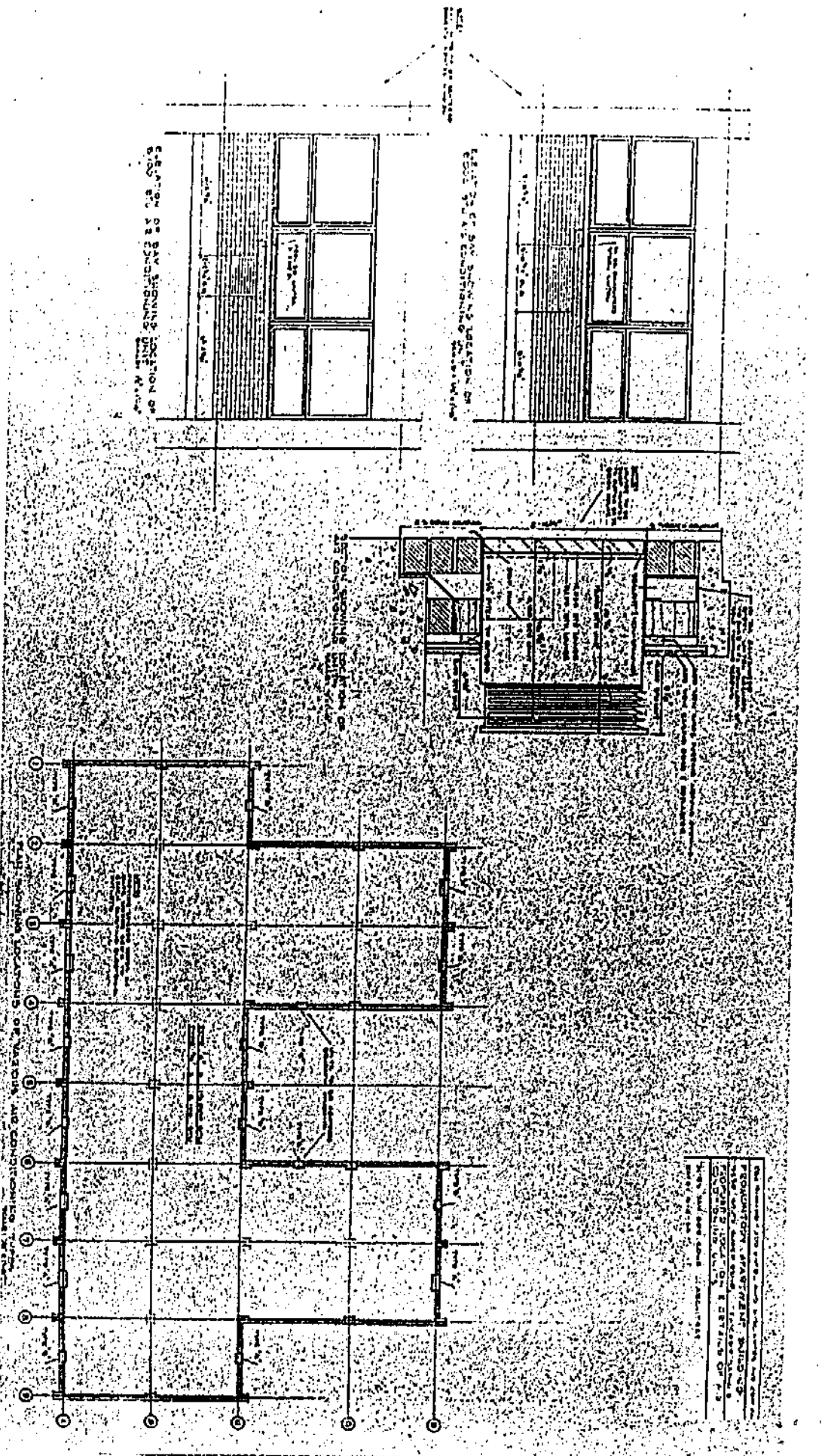
**Perspective View of the Steel and Glass Version of the Promontory Apartments  
Mies van der Rohe, 1946.**

The original of this drawing is in the Mies van der Rohe Archive at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (Ref. 20, Vol. 13, p. 421). The drawing shown above is a copy from the original which was prepared under Mies's supervision in 1964 for the book *Mies van der Rohe: the Art of Structure* (Ref. 10, p. 127).



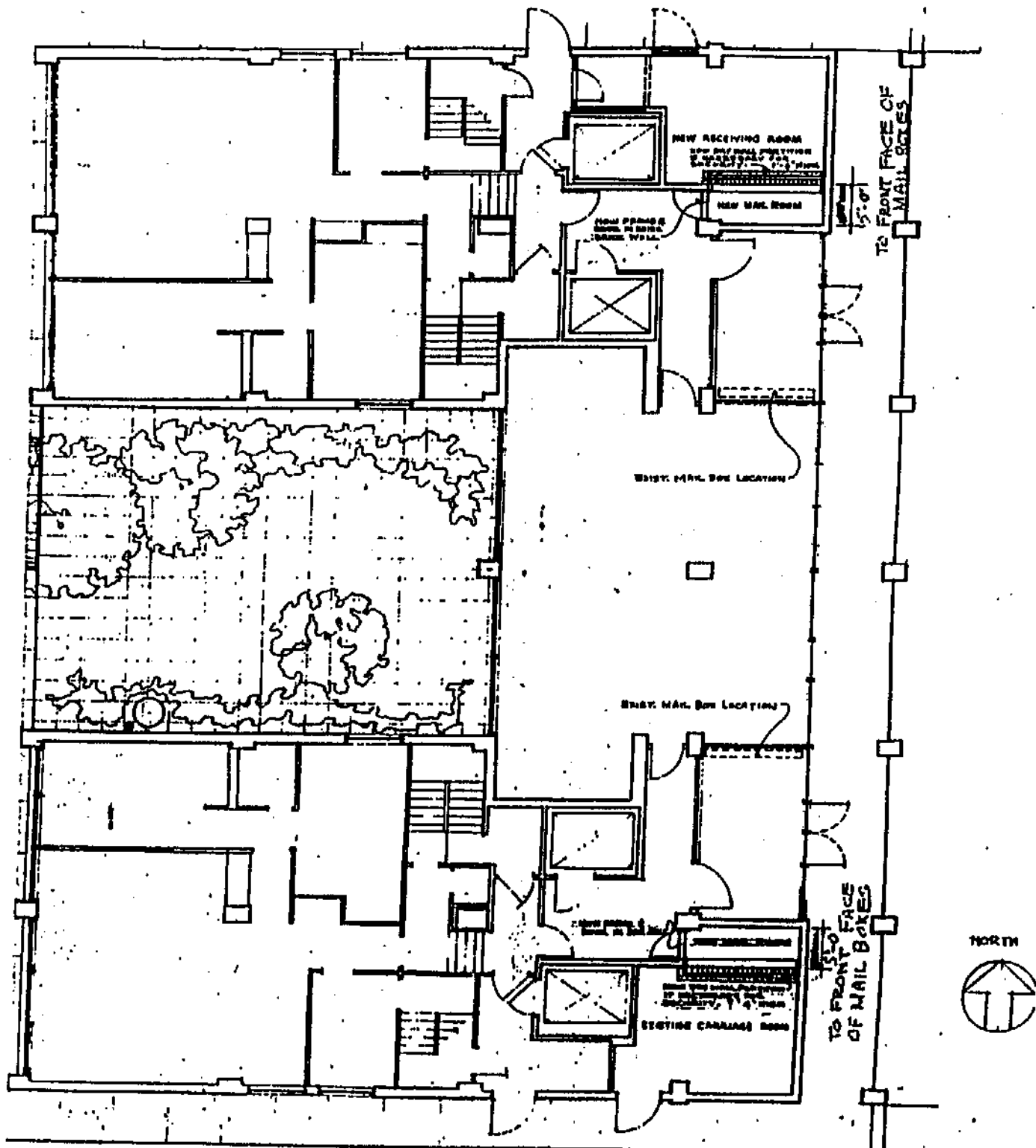
**Perspective View of the Concrete Version of the Promontory Apartments  
Mies van der Rohe, 1946.**

The original of this drawing is in the Mies van der Rohe Archive at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (Ref. 20, Vol. 13, p. 422). The drawing shown above is a copy from the original which was prepared under Mies's supervision in 1964 for the book *Mies van der Rohe: the Art of Structure* (Ref. 10, p. 126).



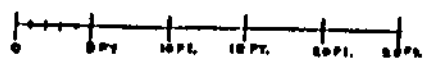
Proposed Location and Details of Air Conditioning Units for Promontory Apartments  
 Mies van der Rohe, March 8, 1966

The original of this drawing is in the Mies van der Rohe Archive at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (Ref. 20, Vol. 13, p. 477).



**PROPOSED MAIL BOX RE-LOCATION FOR  
 PROMONTORY APARTMENT BUILDING  
 5550-52 S. SHORE DRIVE - CHICAGO**

MIES VAN DER ROHE - ARCHITECT MARCH 24-1928







# United States Department of the Interior

## NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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IN REPLY REFER TO:

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(202) 343-1572, fax (202) 343-1836 or E-mail: [edson\\_beall@nps.gov](mailto:edson_beall@nps.gov)

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NOV 29 1996

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KEY: State, County, Property Name, Address/Boundary, City, Vicinity, Reference Number, NHL, Action, Date, Multiple Name

CALIFORNIA, VENTURA COUNTY, Grandma Prisbrey's Bottle Village, 4595 Cochran St., Simi Valley, 96001076, LISTED, 10/25/96

CALIFORNIA, VENTURA COUNTY, Rancho Camulos, 5164 E. Telegraph Rd., Piru, 96001137, LISTED, 11/01/96

FLORIDA, ALACHUA COUNTY, Old Gainesville Depot, Address Restricted, Gainesville vicinity, 96001369, LISTED, 11/22/96

FLORIDA, INDIAN RIVER COUNTY, Fellsmere Public School, 22 S. Orange St., Fellsmere, 96001368, LISTED, 11/22/96 (Fellsmere MPS)

ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY, Promontory Apartments, 5530--5532 South Shore Dr., Chicago, 96001281, LISTED, 11/21/96

ILLINOIS, WASHINGTON COUNTY, Louisville and Nashville Railroad Bridge, 1000 ft. S of IL 177, approximately 5 mi. W of Okawville, Okawville vicinity, 96001280, OWNER OBJECTION DETERMINED ELIGIBLE, 11/20/96

IOWA, DES MOINES COUNTY, The Capitol Theater, 211 N. Third St., Burlington, 96001373, LISTED, 11/22/96

MARYLAND, WASHINGTON COUNTY, Marsh Mills, 17426 and 17432 Spielman Rd., Fairplay, 96001375, LISTED, 11/22/96

MASSACHUSETTS, BRISTOL COUNTY, Rogers Memorial Church, 102 Green St., Fairhaven, 96001374, LISTED, 11/22/96

MASSACHUSETTS, NANTUCKET COUNTY, Diamond Historic District, Roughly bounded by Broad, Lewis, Ocean Sts., Swampscott Line, Lynn Shore Dr., and Wave and Nahant Sts., Lynn, 96001040, LISTED, 10/10/96

MISSISSIPPI, ALCORN COUNTY, Corinth National Cemetery, 1551 Horton St., Corinth, 96001352, LISTED, 11/20/96 (Civil War Era National Cemeteries MPS)

NEBRASKA, DOUGLAS COUNTY, Howard Street Apartment District, Roughly bounded by Harney St., 22nd St., Landon Crt., and 24th St., Omaha, 96001382, LISTED, 11/22/96

NEBRASKA, PLATTE COUNTY, Columbus Commercial Historic District, Roughly bounded by 11th and 14th Sts. and 23rd and 28th Aves., Columbus, 96001353, LISTED, 11/21/96

NEW MEXICO, BERNALILLO COUNTY, Coronado School, 601 4th St., SW, Albuquerque, 96001383, LISTED, 11/22/96 (New Deal in New Mexico MPS)

NEW MEXICO, BERNALILLO COUNTY, Roosevelt Park, Jct. of Coal and Spruce Aves., SE, Albuquerque, 96001384, LISTED, 11/22/96 (New Deal in New Mexico MPS)

NEW MEXICO, BERNALILLO COUNTY, West San Jose School, 1701 4th St., SW, Albuquerque, 96001385, LISTED, 11/22/96 (New Deal in New Mexico MPS)

TENNESSEE, ROBERTSON COUNTY, Walton, Dr. Martin, House, 6360 TN 25, E., Springfield vicinity, 96001318, LISTED, 11/20/96

TEXAS, HARRIS COUNTY, Paul, Allen, House, 2201 Fannin St., Houston, 80004127, PROPOSED MOVE APPROVED, 11/19/96